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Work of the Committee for the Coordination of Statistical Activities

Report of the Secretary-General

Summary

In accordance with a request of the Statistical Commission at its forty-first session (see E/2010/24), the present report is submitted summarizing the main conclusions of the fifteenth and sixteenth sessions of the Committee for the Coordination of Statistical Activities, held in New York on 22 February 2010 and in Vienna from 1 to 3 September 2010. The Commission may wish to take into account the views of the Committee in its discussions under the relevant agenda items. The Commission is invited to take note of the report.

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I. Introduction

1. The Committee for the Coordination of Statistical Activities held two sessions in 2010. The fifteenth session of the Committee was held on 22 February 2010 in New York during the forty-first session of the Statistical Commission, while the sixteenth session of the Committee, hosted jointly by the statistical offices of the United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO), the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) and the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), was held in Vienna from 1 to 3 September 2010. Both meetings were co-chaired by the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development and Eurostat. The present report summarizes the main conclusions of the fifteenth and sixteenth sessions of the Committee.

2. In addition to holding two annual sessions, the Committee operates actively between sessions through a network of task teams and electronic discussion groups, following up on the decisions taken during the regular sessions. The established teams choose their own most appropriate working arrangements and hold their own meetings. In this manner, concrete progress is made in the areas that are currently under discussion by the Committee, namely, the development of shared practices regarding human resource management, quality management, use of imputations/estimations and release of microdata. Also, the task teams work on specific coordination tools, such as reporting on technical cooperation activities, and elaborate tangible products like the global inventory on statistical standards. All these areas of work will be further described in detail in the following sections. Task teams prepare documents on the progress and results of their work and report back to the Committee as a whole for decision-making at its regular sessions. As the secretariat of the Committee, the United Nations Statistics Division works closely with the co-chairs and facilitates communication among Committee members and prepares the reports of the regular sessions and the annual report to the Statistical Commission; it also maintains the Committee's page on the Division's website (unstats.un.org). It is noteworthy that active participation in the work of the Committee has increased over the past year with about 30 international organizations now participating regularly in the Committee's activities.

II. Work of the Committee for the Coordination of Statistical Activities

A. Special session on human capital

3. At its fourteenth session, held in September 2009 in Bangkok, the Committee decided to organize a special session on human capital in conjunction with its sixteenth session. The objective of the special session was to address the current challenges in human resources management in the specific environment of international organizations. The special session brought together managers of international statistical agencies and human resources management experts. It was organized in the following three sessions:

(a) Session 1 explored the extent to which statisticians require special attention in terms of human resources management strategies. During this session the Committee members shared their experience in the recruitment of staff, the

profiling and designing of competences, staff mobility, geographical and gender balance, and initiatives for retaining qualified staff;

(b) Session 2 dealt with the training programmes for statisticians working in international organizations, staff exchanges with national statistical offices and other international agencies, and existing collaboration mechanisms among the Committee members in the field of human resources management;

(c) Session 3 was organized as a round table which discussed how to develop and maintain human capital in official international statistics. In addition, talent acquisition specialists from IAEA presented their experience with headhunting.

4. After an extensive debate on the human resources management issues, the Committee came to the following conclusions:

(a) Human resources management is an important topic for the international statistical agencies as human capital represents their main production factor, and most of their budgets and considerable management time are devoted to it. The key challenges with respect to human resources management include decreasing budgets; increasing competition and competitive pressure from other organizations, including the private sector; the higher level of specialization, skills and information technology knowledge needed; and the heavy burden of bureaucracy;

(b) Human resources management is an appropriate topic for consideration by the Committee, as it is one of the issues faced on a daily basis by statistical managers. For this reason, it is important to have a continuous dialogue among Committee members, but also to have a dialogue with the respective human resources specialists. The future discussions on human resources management should move away from sharing frustration towards sharing experiences and solutions;

(c) International official statisticians, whose number is tentatively estimated at about 2,000 people worldwide, are a professional group with a distinct profile and human resources management needs. It is further recognized that there is subspecialization within the group and shared interests with other professional groups such as analysts, information technology specialists and statisticians at national statistical offices. Recognizing this reality can help international official statisticians identify the potential pool of future candidates as well as the potential for vertical and lateral mobility;

(d) Clearer skill profiles of the group of statisticians working in international agencies as a whole and of its various subgroups will be needed as there exists a gap between some of the existing profiles and the academic training as well as the work expectations of young professional candidates.

5. The Committee decided to establish the following two task teams to work on issues of human resources management:

(a) Task team 1, "Defining the profile of international statisticians and recruitment policies", led by the World Trade Organization (WTO) with the Economic Commission for Africa, the United Nations Population Division, the Statistical, Economic and Social Research and Training Centre for Islamic Countries and UNIDO as members, will look into issues of profiling of various subcategories; sharing experience and best practices in recruitment; more effectively identifying

and reaching out to talent pools, academia, etc., and raising awareness about international statisticians as a group;

(b) Task team 2, "Training of international statisticians: staff exchange and mobility", led by the United Nations Statistics Division with UNODC, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) and Eurostat as members, will focus on identifying training opportunities, including e-learning; look further into mobility and staff exchange issues; and try to document existing models and develop strategies for expanding opportunities.

6. The Committee further decided that the mandates and descriptions of the teams would be refined in a written procedure. First outcomes from the task teams' work should be reported to the Committee at its seventeenth session. A more extensive discussion will take place during the eighteenth session of the Committee, to be held in September 2011.

B. Global statistical system and the role of the Committee

7. The Committee has repeatedly discussed the issue of the governance of the global statistical system and the specific role of the Committee in its management and functioning. At its fifteenth session, the Committee took note of the presentation made by the two co-chairs on this topic and agreed that during its sixteenth session, a discussion on one selected global project would be held. It was further agreed that the agenda for the discussion would focus on the horizontal issues that were common to all Committee members and would explore: (a) the Committee's role in implementation of the global projects from the perspective of international organizations; and (b) how to bring new items to the agenda of the global statistical system.

8. At its sixteenth session, the Committee considered the presentation made by the co-chair Eurostat, which analysed the structure of the global statistical system and outlined the role of the Committee in the implementation of global statistical projects. The revision of the System of National Accounts 2008 was analysed as a specific example of a global project which had its own governance structure; was led in a good spirit of cooperation by international organization members of the Committee; and involved all stakeholders in the global statistical system, especially countries. The presentation identified the following weak points in the structure and process of the project: (a) the limited number of donors; (b) some controversial issues with other international organizations that were not part of the governance structure of this particular project; and (c) the continuous need for a high-level expertise which had put the project's execution and implementation at risk.

9. The subsequent rich discussion focused specifically on the lessons learned from the System of National Accounts 2008 revision process and, more generally, on the possible enhanced role that the Committee could play in other global projects. Two key functions of the Committee emerged as the most important: (a) to keep all its members informed throughout different phases of the project; and (b) to be more proactive and forward-looking in setting its agenda for the future. The Committee supported the proposal made by the co-chair, Eurostat, to build into its future agenda "peer advice forums" which would allow discussion of issues of specific sectors or statistical domains such as the International Comparison Programme and agricultural statistics. Also, owing to the high level of interest in the

System of National Accounts 2008, the Committee decided to consider its implementation as a new and separate global project and to retain it as an item on its agenda, and to have a discussion on the implications for the Committee members during its February 2011 session. The Committee further decided that in order to be proactive, it would be helpful to look into the multi-year programme of work of the United Nations Statistical Commission in advance and, if necessary, give the Committee's position on it during the plenary discussion at the Commission's session. The first review of the programme will take place during the seventeenth session of the Committee, to be held in February 2011.

C. Global inventory on statistical standards

10. The initiative by the National Institute of Statistics and Geography of Mexico to create an inventory of international statistical standards and its transformation into a global inventory under the auspices of the Committee was extensively discussed during the fifteenth and sixteenth sessions. In response to the Statistical Commission's request, a separate report by the Committee on the progress on the inventory's development is being presented to the forty-second session of the Commission (see E/CN.3/2011/30).

D. Coordination of capacity-building activities of international organizations in developing countries

11. The coordination of capacity-building activities of international organizations was first discussed during the special session on statistical capacity-building, convened in conjunction with the eighth session of the Committee held in Montreal, Canada, in September 2006. Subsequently, the Committee established four task teams to deal with various aspects related to the inter-agency coordination of statistical capacity-building efforts and technical assistance to developing countries. The reasons for putting this topic again on the agenda of the sixteenth session of the Committee were: (a) to provide an update on what had happened in this area since the four task teams concluded their mandates; and (b) to clarify whether the Committee members felt that there still remained unresolved issues with respect to the coordination of technical assistance.

12. During a round-table discussion organized at its sixteenth session, the Committee members gave a brief overview of the recent developments in capacity-building activities and existing mechanisms for cooperation and coordination with other partners in their respective organizations. The Committee reached a consensus that despite the good progress achieved in coordinating statistical capacity-building activities since 2006, the issue was important and required continued attention. Therefore, the Committee decided to have a more extensive discussion on issues of coordination of capacity-building activities at its eighteenth session, to be held in September 2011. The World Bank and the Partnership in Statistics for Development in the Twenty-first Century (PARIS21) were requested to take the lead in preparing the agenda and organizing the discussion.

E. Reporting mechanism on statistical capacity-building activities

13. At its fifteenth session, the Committee discussed the *Partner Report on Support to Statistics — PRESS*, published by PARIS21 (see E/CN.3/2011/19). The latest report addressed the concerns raised by the Committee during previous sessions, namely, the low response rate, potential double counting, and reporting of commitments versus disbursements of funds in support of statistical development. The experience of one organization, Eurostat, was presented as a case study on the use of PRESS data. Some Committee members shared their experience with providing information to PRESS and noted that the reporting of funding data for statistical capacity-building activities could pose some difficulties for them owing to the nature and organization of their budget procedures. Other members made recommendations for further improving the representation of geographical and statistical areas in PRESS as well as for expanding its web version by the inclusion of searchable tools. The Committee thanked PARIS21 for taking these concerns into consideration and for continuously working towards the improvement of PRESS. The Committee also expressed satisfaction with the new, more user-friendly version of PRESS. The Committee members were encouraged to report to the 2010 round of PRESS, and those that might experience difficulties with reporting of actual commitments disbursements were advised to provide approximations.

14. At its sixteenth session, the Committee discussed the progress of the 2010 round of PRESS. Noticeable progress had been observed since the 2008 round, both in terms of partners that provided data and projects reported. The Committee congratulated the PARIS21 secretariat for the success of the PRESS exercise, noting with satisfaction the advantages of the newly introduced online system for collecting and validating partner data. Several Committee members particularly acknowledged the cooperative and helpful attitude of the PARIS21 staff who had guided them and facilitated their replies to the PRESS questionnaire. Furthermore, as an outcome of the round-table discussion on coordination of capacity-building activities, PARIS21 was requested to provide an update on its work on measuring the effectiveness of statistical capacity-building to the Commission at its seventeenth session, to be held in February 2011.

F. Use of non-official data in imputations/estimations made by the international organizations

15. At its sixteenth session, the Committee took note of the final report on the use of non-official data in imputations/estimations made by the international organizations prepared by WTO and of the contribution by UNODC to that report. Based on the endorsed terms of reference, the report clearly identified the institutional, practical and technical issues in the use of non-official data, illustrated them with appropriate examples from the current practice of selected international organizations, and concluded with a series of recommendations, valid for various types of imputation. The review of experiences in the use of non-official sources both in the paper and in the subsequent discussion showed that they represented a potential source for supplementary value added in the work of international organizations and that a large array of strategies existed depending on the different statistical "business models" of each international organization. Concerning the third item of the terms of reference, namely, whether and when this issue should be

brought to the attention of the Statistical Commission. WTO and other members of the team who had prepared the paper concluded that while continuous dialogue with Member States on this issue was important, it would be premature to bring it formally to the Statistical Commission.

16. The Committee welcomed the report as it addressed issues that were important for all of its members. After an extensive discussion, the Committee concluded that a new task team should be established which, based on the comprehensive documentation, outcomes from discussions of this and earlier meetings and the in-depth review by the Economic Commission for Europe (ECE) on the use of secondary sources, would formulate for the next session of the Committee best practices in combining different data sources for the production of international statistics, taking into account the issues of transparency of methods used, stability of data sources and quality assurance. The team would be led by ECE with Eurostat, UNODC, the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP), WTO, the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the International Telecommunication Union (ITU), the World Bank, UNIDO and the United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat) as members. The first update on progress in the team's work was expected during the next session of the Committee, to be held in February 2011.

G. Dissemination of microdata by the international organizations

17. At its sixteenth session, the Committee considered a proposal to initiate a discussion on the issue of access to and dissemination of microdata by international organizations, as presented in the report of UNODC. There was no legal basis at the international level that defined access to microdata. General guidance for protection of the confidentiality of collected individual data about natural persons and legal entities was included in the Principles Governing International Statistical Activities (principle 6), but operational aspects in the context of international organizations had not yet been discussed. Extensive guidelines for accessing microdata and managing statistical confidentiality[1] had been developed by the Conference of European Statisticians and subsequently adopted by the Statistical Commission; however, they concerned mainly the work of national statistical systems.

18. In the ensuing discussion, the Committee members expressed sufficient support for the proposal and the Committee decided to include the issue on the agenda of its subsequent sessions. The Committee further stressed that the access to and dissemination of microdata by international organizations had many dimensions. Additional work and more detailed discussion would be necessary for exploring some specific challenges pointed out by the Committee members who had experience with managing microdata, such as those related to the ownership of the data, the geo-spatial aspect in cases of anonymizing data, difficulties with obtaining consent of a country's authorities, etc.

19. The Committee agreed to create a new task team, led by UNODC, with the aim of looking into the issue further and preparing terms of reference for what had to be done in this field. As a starting point in the task team's work, and to avoid

[1] *Managing Statistical Confidentiality and Microdata Access, Principles and Guidelines of Good Practice*, United Nations Publication, Sales No. E.07.II.E.7.

duplication of efforts, the Committee recommended that the existing guidelines on this topic prepared by the Conference of European Statisticians should be consulted to see how they would relate to the work of international organizations. The World Bank, UN-Habitat, the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia, ECE, FAO and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees volunteered to be part of the task team. The task team was requested to submit a progress report to the Commission at its seventeenth session, to be held in February 2011.

H. Establishment of a network of statisticians working in international organizations

20. At its fifteenth session, the Committee took note of the oral presentation made by ESCAP on progress in the establishment of a network of statisticians working in international organizations. The Committee was informed that a group of team members had had an initial exchange of ideas and a discussion on the potential future steps of this initiative. Until the next session, the team would work on a concept paper which should be presented for discussion at the sixteenth session of Committee, in September 2010. As a concrete first step, the team proposed to identify two or three statisticians to be focal points in each member organization who were committed to the highest professional principles and who would form the core of the network. They were expected to share their experience and push for more creative ideas and projects.

21. At its sixteenth session, the Committee considered a proposal to establish a network of international statisticians, prepared by a team comprising ESCAP, Eurostat, the International Labour Organization, UNODC and the World Bank. The proposal highlighted the unique role of international statisticians in the global statistical system and argued for the need to establish a network for this distinct professional group. The objectives of the network, its membership, governance structure and functioning, the financing of possible activities and its relationship with other international statistical associations such as the International Statistical Institute and the International Association for Official Statistics, were among the key issues.

22. The Committee welcomed this interesting initiative, which focused on professionalism and aimed at raising the professional profile of international statisticians and facilitating the exchange of information, training and contacts in general among them. While there was overall support for the proposed network, caution regarding membership, funding principles and the relationship with the International Association for Official Statistics was advised. The Committee was of the view that there were two possible options for the launch of such a network: (a) as a committee of the International Statistical Institute with individual membership, as proposed in the paper; and (b) as a club with a corporate membership model, whose members by definition would be all those working in international organizations. It was decided that a task team would be established to elaborate in more detail the terms of reference of a potential club of statisticians working in international organizations. The task team would be led by ESCAP with the following organizations as members: World Bank, UNODC, Eurostat and IMF. The team would also develop a structure and look into the administrative, legal and financial aspects of a club that would allow each of the international organizations

to participate. The Committee requested the task team to prepare a progress report for its seventeenth session, to be held in February 2011.

I. Conference on Data Quality for International Organizations

23. At its fifteenth session, the Committee took note of the proposed agenda of the Conference on Data Quality for International Organizations, which would be held immediately following the European Conference on Quality in Statistics, held in Helsinki from 4 to 6 May 2010. The United Nations Statistics Division and Eurostat, on behalf of the organizing committee, requested the individual agencies to make a commitment to attend the Conference on Data Quality and contribute to its organization by making presentations and chairing sessions. The Committee members reconfirmed their intention to attend and suggested some modifications to the proposed agenda. The Statistics Division, in accordance with the Committee's request, collected concrete proposals for presentations, finalized the agenda and circulated it electronically among members.

24. At its sixteenth session, the Committee made an evaluation of the Conference on Data Quality for International Organizations. The general feeling of the Committee members was that in the future this event, held back-to-back with the European Conference, should be oriented towards training, targeting working-level/junior statisticians among the Committee's member organizations. However, having in mind the importance of quality for the entire work of international organizations, the Committee further decided to keep the issue on its agenda for subsequent sessions. How to communicate quality to users and how to foster a "quality culture" were suggested as topics for discussion. The Committee decided to have a more comprehensive discussion on this issue at its eighteenth session, to be held in September 2011, and invited WTO and the European Central Bank to identify the key issues for an initial exchange of views during the seventeenth session of the Committee, to be held in February 2011.

J. Observance of the first World Statistics Day

25. The Committee had regularly taken note of the progress in the organization of the first World Statistics Day. The United Nations Statistics Division strongly encouraged all Committee members to make a contribution in their respective subject-matter areas and location and pledged to assist them with the overall coordination of the events worldwide and their publicizing on the designated website. Individual members also kept the Committee informed about their initiatives for the observance. A comprehensive evaluation of the experience with the organization of World Statistics Day, prepared by the United Nations Statistics Division, is being presented to the Commission at its forty-second session (E/CN.3/2011/2).

K. Other issues discussed

26. At its fifteenth session, ITU informed the Committee about the International Seminar on Information and Communication Technology Statistics, jointly organized by the United Nations Statistics Division, ITU, the United Nations

Conference on Trade and Development and the Statistical Office of the Republic of Korea and in collaboration with the Partnership on Measuring ICT for Development in Seoul from 19 to 21 July 2010. The Committee members were invited to take part in the seminar.

27. At the sixteenth session of the Committee, the World Bank, the current leader of the Statistical Data and Metadata Exchange (SDMX) sponsor group, provided a brief description of the status of the SDMX partnership and programme of work (see E/CN.3/2011/31). The Committee was informed that: (a) since the last update, the partnership had held three meetings; (b) the work on a new technical standard (version 2.1), which would enhance the functionality of the system, was well under way; (c) two working groups, technical and statistical, would be set up and were expected to become operational by the end of 2010; and (d) the third SDMX Global Conference would be hosted jointly by the World Bank and IMF in Washington, D.C., from 2 to 4 May 2011. The World Bank and other sponsors welcomed the ECE initiative to organize a seminar on SDMX for national statistical offices during the June 2011 meeting of the Conference of European Statisticians and had committed to prepare a paper for it.

28. At its sixteenth session, FAO informed the Committee about the outcomes from the Symposium on Information Systems for Food Security (ISFS), held on 1 and 2 September 2010 in Brussels. ISFS had initially tried to address mainly early-warning and short-term emergency responses to food crises, but was increasingly serving the needs for information that supported food crisis prevention and preparedness. Moreover, there was wide recognition that ISFS should also inform long-term development actions such as poverty reduction strategies and the adaptation of farming systems to climate change. Statistics was the key component of ISFS and good quality, reliable, timely and transparent data were essential to identify appropriate development policies and emergency responses. It was noted that although work on ISFS had implications for the activities of many of the Committee's members, so far the statistical community had not been involved in the discussions of this important issue. FAO therefore proposed that a new task team should be created which would develop a set of statistical indicators and establish statistical standards in the food security domain. The Committee agreed to take up the issue and requested FAO to prepare a document describing the way forward for its February 2011 session.

29. Representatives of UNHCR attended the sixteenth session of the Committee as observers. The co-chairs informed them about the formal procedure for application as stated in the terms of reference of the Committee and invited them to communicate their decision to the secretariat.

30. The Committee agreed that its seventeenth session would be held in New York, in the morning of 21 February 2011, in conjunction with the forty-second session of the United Nations Statistical Commission. The Committee was pleased to accept Eurostat's offer to host its eighteenth session in Luxembourg from 7 to 9 September 2011.